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The Analysis School and Feminism: Intersection, Explanation and a Challenge

Stephen Kemp

1. Introduction

In this chapter I will compare the views of reflexivity and the situated character of knowledge in *On the Beginning of Social Inquiry* and in some feminist perspectives. One of my aims is to draw out what I see as similarities between the two, which both offer insightful views about reflexivity and its role in social scientific inquiry. These similarities are intriguing insofar as they arose despite the apparent absence of an interchange of ideas between feminist thinkers and the authors of *On the Beginning of Social Inquiry*. A second aim of the piece is to analyse how these similarities might have come about. The third task of the piece is to critically probe the presuppositions of both approaches, particularly in relation to how successfully they break from the assumptions of approaches that they are rejecting. And the final concern will be to consider whether each approach has ideas that can help take the other's project forward.

In a book about *On the Beginning of Social Inquiry (OBSI)*, an extensive introduction to the text is unnecessary. However let me note here that it is an early collaborative work by writers who sometimes refer to themselves as proponents of 'Analysis'. The writers involved have gone on to build up an impressive body of work addressing questions of reflexivity, value and interpretation in the social sciences (see for example Blum and McHugh, 1984; Raffel, 2013). More relevant to this volume, however, is an introduction to feminist approaches to reflexivity. The first point that I want to make is that the writers of *OBSI* shared theoretical premises to a large extent, whereas this is less true of feminist defenders of reflexivity. For this reason, it would be quite questionable to give an outline of feminist approaches to reflexivity as if all shared a single presupposition. One, admittedly crude, way to distinguish feminist approaches is to separate those who are more sympathetic to 'realism' and those who are more sympathetic to 'constructionist' approaches to social inquiry. Of course the usage of each of these terms is complex and contested in itself. But, roughly speaking, those feminists who have realist commitments are inclined to see society as a hierarchically structured entity, the characteristics of which can be more or less successfully grasped. For such thinkers, being reflexive involves understanding one's position within this hierarchy and its bearing on the knowledge that one generates. One early contribution to feminist debates about reflexivity with somewhat realist commitments comes from Sandra Harding. Harding is best known for her espousal of feminist standpoint theory and for producing a classic typology to situate it in relation to other approaches, but her 1983 article 'Common causes: toward a reflexive feminist theory' addressed the reflexive location of knowledge. In this article, Harding states:

'...we must be able to explain, understand and criticize our own inquiry practices in terms of the very same kinds of causes of practices and beliefs which our theories claim structure the social order.' (Harding, 1983: 31)

Harding's use of the terms 'structure' and 'social order' is not misleading here, and she uses them elsewhere in the article along with the claim that the 'sex/gender system' is the key discovery of feminist research (Harding, 1983: 33). For Harding, social structures shape what can be known and reflexivity involves thinking about what these structures permit different groups to 'know' at different junctures (Harding, 1983: 38).

By way of contrast to realist-oriented approaches, feminist approaches to reflexivity which are more strongly indebted to constructionist thought are less keen to talk of structure, cause and system, and more inclined to argue for the importance of language and difference in understanding society. In particular, in constructionist forms of feminism there is a tendency to see language as a crucially constitutive part of social relations rather than as a medium which allows a better or worse representation of reality (see e.g. Miller, 2000). Arguments for this position are often linked to post-structuralist writers like Foucault (1972) and Derrida (1976) who have, in different ways, rejected representational accounts of language in favour of arguing for its constitutive force. An acceptance of the argument that language has a constitutive role in society is closely linked to feminist enthusiasm for reflexivity because the inquirer's language-use then becomes a crucial topic to explore, and inquirers are encouraged to engage in self-examination in order to understand their contribution to the account of the world that they offer (e.g. Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). In doing so, inquirers explore the ways in which their own social positioning and background has shaped the knowledge-claims that they produce. Here I want to explore the links between feminist constructionism and the Analysis approach, because of the intriguing similarities and overlaps, although I will also be noting relevant differences.¹

2. Exploring the Similarities Between *On the Beginning of Social Inquiry* and Feminist Constructionism

I want to begin my comparison between the early Analysis work and feminist constructionism by considering the status of language and linguistic utterances in each approach. Crucial to the approach taken in *On the Beginning of Social Inquiry*, is the idea that any act of writing or speech is not independent or self-subsistent. Rather, speech is dependent on something else:

‘Since we treat every finding, every speech, every chapter in this book as a mere surface reflection of what makes them possible, since no speech is in this sense perfect or self-sufficient, speaking and writing is always from the perspective of analysis an inadequate activity.’ (McHugh et al, 1974: 3)

What is it that speech, then, is dependent on? For the Analysis school, it is dependent on its auspices, its grounds. It is these that ‘make what is said possible, sensible, conceivable’ (McHugh et al, 1974: 2). But how are these auspices and grounds to be conceived? I would suggest that the Wittgensteinian conception of ‘language games’ is somewhat helpful in explicating this. In the first place, *language* is crucial here. Speech is embedded in language that makes it possible and intelligible, rather than such speech being free-standing. Using another term that the Analysis school favour, speech is grounded in ‘convention’. However, language itself is not free-standing but is grounded in interactions with others, and here we can see the relevance of the idea of language *games*, activities that are conducted with others. These others are, for McHugh et al, a community

¹ In making a separation between realist and constructionist approaches to feminism I am setting aside a tantalising issue about the possible convergence of the two. It might be argued that in seeing social influences as shaping the understandings of inquirers, constructionists are adopting a ‘realist’ attitude, i.e. seeing these social influences as something that can be represented in their own discourse (cf Latour, 1992). It is this kind of point that leads Gillian Rose to argue for the uncertainty of self-representation as well as alter-representation when exploring the appropriate approach to reflexivity (Rose, 1997)

of language users. It is in understanding the way in which community is conceived of by the Analysis school that the connotative limitations of the term 'games' may become apparent. This is because McHugh et al argue that communities are characterised by deeply held moral commitments, which are expressed in their speech (see for example McHugh et al, 1974: 79).

This focus on the grounding of speech in community reflects what might be called the 'ontological' orientation of Analysis, which is consonant with their interest in Heidegger's work. Although language-usage is crucial to their approach, proponents of Analysis fundamentally connect it to a concern with the deep character of community and relationality. As well as focusing on moral commitments, *OBSI* explores the dialectic of identity and questions of self and other, as apparent in the chapters dealing with *Snubs* and *Travel*. In their analysis of *Snubs*, McHugh et al explore the deep assumptions that are revealed by reflecting on interactions where one participant fails to accept the greeting of the other. These assumptions are revealed to relate to the way in which an actor giving a greeting attempts to collect together self and other in a mutual recognition of their sameness whereas the proponent of a snub withholds such recognition. Likewise, in their considerations on *Travel*, the exponents of Analysis are concerned with the relation of the traveller both to the community s/he leaves and to the community s/he visits, exploring the superficial and uncommitted character of sociality embodied in travelling. From these examples, we can see that the Analysis approach is fundamentally interested in considering the grounds in community and relationality out of which speech and activity emerge. And it is because they argue that any speech act reflects these grounds but cannot ultimately capture them that McHugh et al argue for the situated and always limited character of such speech.

In the first significant overlap that we are noting, feminist constructionists also wish to avoid the idea that speech and writing is self-subsistent. One way in which this concern has had a specific significance for feminists is that in promoting an understanding of the social, cultural and political character of gender relations, they have been concerned to challenge speech about sex and gender that presented itself as 'natural' or as simple 'common sense' (for one example see Davies, 2003: 1-2). The 'obvious facts' of sex and gender were being disrupted by feminists and this encouraged a concern to understand the non-surface, non-obvious roots of the naturalisation of gender in speech and writing. In order to theorize the challenge to common utterance, feminist constructionists often drew on structuralist and especially post-structuralist writers.

Probably the most common reference point within feminist constructionism is the Foucault-inspired notion of discourse. The term 'discourse' has a wide range of meanings, of course, and some of this plurality comes through in variations within feminist approaches. Nevertheless, one common usage involves feminists referring to a discourse as a relatively structured and organized set of ideas and practices that shapes possible forms of subjectivity (see for example, Weedon, 1997). Although this is not always fully explicit, discourse in these usages seems to be seen as something underlying what is said, and thus the ground of utterances and their meaning. To use an example discussed in Cameron (1998), when analysing why the word 'Ladies' is used on a toilet door feminist poststructuralists would not treat the meaning of the word as self-subsistent, or as reflecting nature/biology, but would look at the linguistic and practical discursive grounds which make sense of the use of the term "Ladies" rather than e.g. "Women", and indeed make sense of the practice of separating toilet facilities by sex/gender.

Another line of feminist constructionism takes its inspiration from Derrida. In her work on 'Rhizovocality', Alecia Youngblood Jackson explores the non-innocent character of the voices of participants within research and states that on a poststructuralist view

'...voice is not transparent; it can no longer express an absolute, ideal, essential meaning that is present/conscious to itself.' (Jackson, 2003: 702)

Here Jackson is drawing on Derrida's idea that speech cannot be solidly grounded, but relies for its meaning on elusive traces back through previous usages (see Derrida, 1976). And this kind of argument takes the feminist challenge to 'natural' speech a step further insofar as it questions not just the authenticity of utterances that naturalize gender but also the speech of those suffering from gendering processes in society, which is not seen as grounded in the unquestionable realities of their lives.

When discussing Analysis, I referred to its ontological concern with questions of community and relationality. Although a concern with these elements is undoubtedly present in some feminist analysis, it is tempting to suggest that discourse, language, and indeed power, are the fundamental ontological entities for feminist constructionism. That is to say, for the latter approach it is the combined operation of discourse, language and power that works to create differentiated and unequal forms of identity that are considered the key features of society. I will return to questions of inequality and community in the Concluding section of the chapter.

So far, we have considered an initial similarity between Analysis and feminist constructionism in their accounts of the non-presence of speech and writing. But in each case, this analysis of language is then developed further in order to generate a critical account of certain forms of speech and writing. In essence, what is criticised is those forms of utterance which fail to recognize their dependence on a background that is not full present within them.

For McHugh et al, the form of speech that involves a misrecognition of the character of language is 'concrete' speech. They state:

'Concrete speech ignores its achieved character, violates itself and conceives of itself as first. When concrete speech attempts to locate its grounds it points to "external" nature, to "internal" mind(s), to the self-organizing activity of speech itself, or to past events under the delusion that such "sources" are external to speech.' (McHugh et al, 1974: 15)

In this quote, the proponents of Analysis outline two ways that those who see speech as concrete can be mistaken about their speech. One is to believe that speech is 'first', which involves failing to see that for speech to occur there need to be auspices and grounds which are the basis of its production. The other mistake occurs when proponents of concrete speech do admit that their utterances have grounds, but wrongly identify the character of these.

Let's explore one example of misidentified grounds. According to the Analysis school, proponents of concrete speech may believe that their descriptions are grounded in nature itself. We can take this to mean that concrete speakers believe that representations of natural objects are underwritten by the state of those objects in themselves. It's worth pointing out here that even concrete speakers are unlikely to hold that *all* uses of language give an accurate representation of their subject matter. If they did, the common aim of distinguishing between true and false representations would be

pointless – all representations would be true. What is more typical is the idea that true belief is grounded in nature itself. Who is it that accepts this kind of position? One such theoretical grouping was only beginning to emerge when *OBSI* was published, and can be called realist, relevant sub-categories being critical realism (e.g. Bhaskar, 1975; Archer, 1995) and scientific realism (e.g. Psillos, 1999). Although realists, at times, recognize aspects of the mediating character of representation, they also have a strong commitment to the existence of real objects and processes, and see theories and beliefs as oriented to representing these.

In *OBSI* positivism is a key approach that is identified as having a concrete conception of speech. This might seem puzzling as if we look at, for example, the logical positivists, they often harbour doubts about grounding science in reality, in things-themselves, seeing these as problematic metaphysical concepts. The concern to avoid a metaphysical attempt to use reality as a ground motivates logical positivists to instead treat 'sense experience' as the basic element of analysis. And indeed, many logical positivists might be characterised as conventionalist in character, although there were disputes within the school (see Hanfling, 1981 for discussion). I think this puzzle about the accusation that positivists have a concrete conception of speech can be resolved by noting the sheer variety of uses of 'positivism' as a term, both by those who were happy to classify themselves as such, and by critics (see Bryant, 1985). Thus the term positivism can be used to refer not just to logical positivists but also to those practitioners who adopt a scientific orientation and have an unproblematic confidence that their claims are grounded in the characteristics of reality (see McHugh et al (1974:75) for how they characterise the 'positivist' programme).

For the proponents of Analysis, the alternative to a misguided concrete conception of speech is speech that acknowledges its grounds. This is easier said than done. As McHugh et al state:

'...to be caught up in the activity of formulation is to face away from one's own fundamental grounds through which those formulations come about.' (McHugh et al, 1974: 3)

Thus, in *OBSI* it is argued that speaking turns one away from one's grounds, making their recuperation very difficult. For McHugh et al there is no way to completely resolve this difficulty. However, that does not mean that there is no way at all to avoid the perils of concrete speech. What McHugh et al recommend is the value of collaboration. Collaborators who listen to ones utterances or read ones words can help to identify the grounds of that speech (McHugh et al, 1974: 3-4). Of course, the response of a collaborator does not bring the analysis to a conclusion, as this response also needs to be situated in its own grounds, as part of an ongoing process. Nevertheless, this ongoing situating process is seen by McHugh et al as a way to deepen one's understanding of what is spoken or written.

As with the Analysis school, feminist constructionists have been very critical of utterances, particularly knowledge claims, that do not acknowledge their situated character. One key feminist work which discusses these issues is by Donna Haraway. Haraway has written a range of insightful and provocative discussions which make connections between sex/gender, knowledge, science, technology and animals (1990, 2003). Here I want to discuss a quote from her well-regarded piece 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective' (1988). Even the title of this article, with its reference to 'situated knowledge' cues us in to her feminist concern that knowledge claims should be located. Haraway states:

'I would like to insist on the embodied nature of all vision and so reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere. This is the gaze that mythically inscribes all marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation' (1988: 581)

Haraway is here critiquing forms of knowledge that she presents as oriented to seeing but not being seen, forms of knowledge that do not admit to their own bases, presenting themselves as from nowhere. In this category Haraway places techno-scientific forms of knowledge including those drawn on for military purposes. But it is also worth mentioning that from feminist perspectives the limitations of existing positions are often connected with the influence of a masculine orientation to the social world. So, for at least some feminists, it is an abstract masculine mode of thought and action which tries to conceal its basis by obscuring its roots (Haraway, 1988: 577-8).

In terms of a positive response to these issues, many feminist constructionists have argued that a commitment to reflexivity is an important way to deal with the problems of the 'gaze from nowhere'. On this view, it is crucial that those making knowledge-claims situate themselves, acknowledge that they are coming from a particular position, social background and perspective. One of the questions that has arisen from this feminist emphasis on situatedness is how those in differently situated perspectives can have meaningful interactions with one another, and I want to return to this issue in the final section of the chapter.

I will return to this issue in the final section of the chapter, but now want to consider one more overlap between the Analysis school and feminist constructionism. This is that both approaches criticise the idea that moral and political commitments are 'private' matters to be excluded from research. This argument is made in quite a subtle way in *On the Beginning of Social Inquiry* and it will be interesting to explore the way it comes up in McHugh et al's critique of the positivist notion of 'bias'. For positivists, bias is a problematic feature of research that features it. One important way it is seen to operate is as a form of favouritism towards a particular answer to a research question (McHugh et al, 1974: 49). Where does this favouritism come from? On the Analysis account, positivists see favouritism as an intrusion of the private interests of the inquirer into public, communal, discourse:

'When we fail to see community in an inquiry we are expected, according to the rules of the scientific language game, to look for his [sic] private interests as the means for understanding his inquiry. When we find such interests, we are charging bias.' (McHugh et al, 1974: 63)

A further intriguing point that McHugh et al make is that many positivist treatments argue that bias cannot be completely removed from scientific inquiry (McHugh et al, 1974: 51). What this means is that positivists both deplore the influence of private self-interest on public inquiry but also admit that it cannot be removed.

The treatment of bias in *OBSI* is complex and I cannot cover all aspects of it here. For our purposes, a key move that McHugh et al make is the argument that what positivists see as favouritism is, in fact, commitment (1974: 51-2). When taken this way, what positivists are recognizing in their remarks about the ineradicable character of bias is, implicitly, the ineradicable character of the

commitment of researchers. And for members of the Analysis school commitment is not something that should not be disavowed or proclaimed to be problematic. Rather, it is part of the grounds of an activity which can be (at least partially) recollected through the collaborative work recommended in *OBSI*. Furthermore, these grounds are not to be understood to be private features of an individual inquirer but as shared between members of a community of language use who share forms of life.

Turning to feminism, we can see that a key tenet of feminist methodology has been a rejection of the idea that moral and political commitments are private, and best kept outside of the research process. This rejection has been made on the basis of at least two arguments. Firstly, feminists have been very critical of the public/private distinction and the idea that there is a principled division to be made between the two (for a discussion by a key feminist thinker see Pateman, 1983). This critique has been made on various grounds, but one important aspect, of course, identifies problems with the socio-cultural association of men with the public realm and women with the private realm, an association which connects men with paid work and political activity, and women with the home, domesticity, and so on.

Secondly, feminists have been keen to emphasize that morality and politics, as well as personal experience, are very much part of the research process. Some feminists would argue that this is even the case in the natural sciences, Sandra Harding being one example (see Harding, 1991). But there is almost a consensus amongst feminists that in social inquiry a researcher's moral values, political leanings and experiences have an influence on the research that they undertake. To pick just one example, Gail Letherby is a feminist researcher who states that:

‘Feminist work highlights the fact that the researchers’ choice of methods, of research topic and of study group population are always political acts’ (Letherby, 2003: 4)

And although feminists are concerned with the moral and political commitments in their own research, they are also keen to highlight that even research which seems ‘neutral’ or ‘un-committed’ is still shaped by value commitments. One particular area of focus here has been the attempt to look at purportedly neutral research and expose the hidden masculine values shaping research questions, methods and findings. One classic example of this is Ann Oakley's (1981) critique of the advice given to interviewers by methodologists. Oakley argues that this advice encouraged interviewers to strongly constrain their engagement with interviewees, deflecting any questions directed at the interviewer and operating almost like a mechanical-recording machine. Oakley contends that this is not a ‘neutral’ way to conduct interviews but one which is shaped by a masculine ideal of the detached, unemotional, unresponsive self, this ideal being premised on a rejection of feminine emotionality, engagement and so on.

3. Can we Explain the Similarities?

Having outlined a number of similarities between feminist constructionism and the Analysis school, I now want to address this as a puzzle: how is it that these similarities exist? This puzzle would be very easy to solve if it turned out that members of the Analysis school were an early influence on feminist constructionists or vice versa. But this simply does not seem to be the case. *On the Beginning of Social Inquiry* was not cited by feminist constructionist writers in the 1970s and 1980s,

and has only occasionally been cited by them since (see e.g. Miller, 2000). And feminist views are not cited or discussed in *On the Beginning of Social Inquiry*, although they have occasionally been considered by later sympathisers with Analysis such as Bonner (2001). Given this apparent lack of mutual influence, how are we to explain the overlap?

One possibility would be to call on the kind of theoretical apparatus Foucault develops in *The Order of Things* (2002 [1970]). In this work Foucault argues that different domains of knowledge – those relating to life, language and labour – share deep assumptions that give them a common underlying structure. These deep assumptions have been transformed at particular points in history, with the result that theories and concepts in the areas also transformed in character. Foucault called these deep assumptions ‘epistemes’, and he was particularly interested in assumptions about the appropriate way to order objects and those addressing the relationship between words and things. We have already seen that the question of the relation between words and things, or more broadly between words and their subject matter (thing-like or otherwise) is a concern of the Analysis school and feminist constructionism. Foucault’s approach also seems relevant in that he is undoubtedly intending to provide an account of how different knowledge-producers can share assumptions when they have not influenced one another. However, in my view there are unsatisfactory elements to Foucault’s analysis of epistemes. For one thing, Foucault implies that epistemes are not able to be grasped by knowledge-producers that operate within them (see for example Foucault, 2002: 307). It would be rather ironic if the shared presuppositions of schools that are committed to exploring their own assumptions were intrinsically unavailable to them. However, it seems to me that Foucault does not really offer an argument to support his claim. Secondly, Foucault’s epistemes are somewhat mysterious in their operation. Foucault himself acknowledged that he does not give an explanation of what caused them to change (2002: xiii-xiv). As well as this, we can point out that he doesn’t give an explanation of why some forms of knowledge are subject to a specific episteme and others are not.² Thus, even if we were to take up the idea that feminist constructionism and the Analysis School share an episteme, it would be not clear why they fall within this episteme whilst, say, realists do not.

As a tentative alternative, I want to suggest that the solution to the puzzle lies in another factor: shared influences. This might seem an odd claim. After all, there is a case for seeing the three main influences on *On the Beginning of Social Inquiry* as Wittgenstein, Heidegger and ethnomethodology. Although there is important feminist work in the ethnomethodological tradition (particularly West and Zimmerman, 1987) I think it would be inaccurate to see ethnomethodology as a major direct influence on feminist constructionism. Likewise, neither Wittgenstein nor Heidegger are direct sources of influence on feminist thought in any substantial way. Nevertheless, I think there is a case for seeing one of these writers as having had an important *indirect* influence on feminist thought: Heidegger. The key point here is that Heidegger had an influence on feminism, but mediated through the ideas of Foucault.

So how did Heidegger influence each approach? Starting with *On the Beginning of Social Inquiry*, we might infer the influence of Heidegger from the way that communicative acts are seen as necessarily based in a ‘Being’ that ‘does not show itself in itself’ (McHugh et al, 1974: 16), although there are

² Gary Gutting notes that Foucault is unclear even on this point, sometimes characterising his approach as one that does deal with specific regions of knowledge and at other points characterising his approach as one that applies to Western thought in general (Gutting, 1989: 178).

only brief references to Heidegger in the text (e.g. McHugh et al, 1974: 110, 149). Broadly speaking, I would argue that the Analysis school follow Heidegger in seeing speech as “grounded” in a contingent linguistic community. From a Heideggerian perspective this applies as much to scientific speech as other forms of utterance (Gadamer, 1981: 162-3), and this is developed in *OBSI* through an analysis of positivist practices in the social sciences.

Turning to feminist constructionism, it is fairly clear, as noted above, that proponents of this approach were influenced and inspired by various aspects of Foucault’s analysis of language and subjectivity. One concern of Foucault was to challenge the idea of a trans-historical ‘subject’, that is, the idea that individual actors and knowers might have certain features that were the same no matter what socio-historical era they were located within. This was taken up by feminist constructionists who argued that subjects are crucially shaped by socio-historically located discourses, such that subjects’ self-conceptions are (at least in part) a contingent feature of these discourses rather than tapping into some generalized form of rationality or indeed into direct empirical apprehension. Of course, there is a missing link in this attempt to connect feminism and Heidegger here, and that is the connection between Foucault and Heidegger. I admit that there are markedly different views about the character of this link (see for example Ijsseling, 1986; Sluga, 2006; Dreyfus, 1996). One likely reason for this is that although Foucault insisted in a late interview on the importance of Heidegger’s writings to his development (reprinted in Foucault, 1988), Foucault made very few explicit references to Heidegger’s ideas in his work. The line of argument I want to put forward here is that there is a meaningful connection between Foucault and Heidegger in that both are concerned with the contingent and historical character of subjects, and in the important role of language in producing this (Ijsseling, 1986). In this respect their views are in marked contrast to those of Hegel, who saw the subject as historical but importantly as non-contingent, as travelling through necessary phases of development on the way to the culmination of spirit. Thus, I accept Foucault’s remarks about the importance of Heidegger to the development of his thought and see this influence as being taken up and developed by feminist constructionists.³

I don’t want to overstate my confidence in the explanation that I have provided, but nevertheless I do think it is worth taking seriously the view that the overlap between the Analysis school and feminist constructionism derives, at least in part from the shared (though in one case mediated) influence of Heidegger. Of course, to *situate* these approaches in terms of their influences is not to *reduce* their ideas to those of predecessors, and both feminist constructionism and the Analysis school push forward our understanding of the situated character of language and subject-hood. In particular, both are concerned not with these ideas as broad philosophical assertions, but with developing ways of conducting and reflecting on social inquiry that take seriously the situated character of the social researcher, and make this a matter for exploration.

4. Feminist Constructionism and *On the Beginning of Social Inquiry*: An Issue

³ It is perhaps also worth considering here that feminists have also drawn on Derrida’s thought (see for example the aforementioned Jackson, 2003) and that Heidegger was also an influence on Derrida (Dews, 1987: 5)

Having explored the similarities in the commitments of Analysis and feminist constructionist positions, I would now like to consider one problematic issue with these approaches. This relates to the question of what a reflexive orientation can hope to achieve. As we have seen, both feminist constructionists and members of the Analysis school place a great deal of attention on exploring the situated character of their own knowledge production, and see the value of locating the grounds on which social inquiry is based. The issue I want to explore here is the question of what the ideal form of reflexive knowledge is understood to be. What I want to argue is that there is potentially a tension in the work of the analysis school and in some feminist constructionist accounts between a recognition of the situated character of knowledge and the ideal of knowledge being upheld. The particular problem here is the way in which both approaches seem to, at least sometimes, uphold transparency as an ideal.

Let me start to develop this with a quote from *On the Beginning of Social Inquiry*:

‘...analysis brings to light the contradiction which every speech re-presents by treating the speech as an appearance of that which grounds it. The problem for analysis is always the difference...the success of the solution to a problem does not reside in its elimination of a difference – but in making the difference between speech and language transparent.’
(McHugh et al, 1974: 18)

Here, one of the contributions of analysis is held to be the way that it reveals that concrete speech is not identical to its grounds. This is presented as a matter of making this difference ‘transparent’. A similar invocation of transparency emerges in the later discussion of the question of positivism and its ideas of bias. McHugh et al state:

‘We do not reject bias, but we make its claim transparent by showing how it rests upon a particular version of knowledge and how this version of knowledge formulates adequate speech as speech which accurately describes things’ (McHugh et al, 1974: 66)

The idea of transparency is invoked in this case as a way of characterising how the grounds of positivist conceptions of bias have been revealed in the process of Analysis.

The idea of ‘transparency’ is also invoked at times by feminist constructionists. As an example, let us consider the widely cited feminist methodologists Mauthner and Doucet. In their article ‘Reflexive Accounts and Accounts of Reflexivity in Qualitative Data Analysis’ (2003) they argue that researchers need to be aware of the various epistemological and ontological conceptions that shape their work: Mauthner and Doucet state:

‘We suggest that the particular conceptions employed are less important than the *epistemological accountability* involved in making these conceptions as transparent as possible for the readers of our research accounts...’ (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003: 424).

I should acknowledge that these writers don’t say that background conceptions can be fully transparent. Nevertheless, the idea that they should be as transparent as possible, that transparency is an ideal, is clearly advocated here.

Moving into a critical mode, what strikes me about the idea of transparency is that it seems to invoke an idea of representation that is actually being rejected by both approaches. It seems to

imply a merging of the representation into the represented. This is because when we think of transparency, we think of a layer that is see-through, that allows what is behind it to come through undistorted and unaltered. But both the Analysis approach and feminist constructionists argue in their core accounts that this is not how representation works. They argue that representation is not direct, that concepts and utterances are not 'see through', but that they necessarily have a thickness, a contribution of their own.

If this point stands, then perhaps what is needed is a different concept or metaphor to deal with what is being advocated. It is interesting to ponder such an alternative, as many potential candidates seem 'realist' in their presuppositions, in a way that is out of keeping with the non-realist presuppositions of these approaches. So talk about 'revealing' the background concepts, or 'revealing' the relation between speech and its grounds, would seem to involve a commitment to unmasking appearances and showing the reality behind. 'Displaying' is perhaps a bit more neutral, and does not have the same connotation of unmasking. But arguably it is still realist, in that it implies that those who are displaying are 'showing' what really is there. Once again, we see that the lingering realism within many such concepts and metaphors makes them unsuitable to replace the notion of transparency.

Of course, there is not space in the remainder of this chapter to develop a substantial alternative. But let me float, if only briefly, a possible conceptualization that does not have an obviously realist orientation. This is the idea that analysts might be seen as 'accounting for' something, taken to mean 'giving a satisfactory account of' that subject matter. So, in the feminist case, what we might say is that it is important to 'account for' the presuppositions of the research. And in the Analysis case the goal would be to give a satisfactory account of, say, the relation between some form of speech and the language that underlies it. The advantage of this formulation is that there is no implication that the analysis in question needs to disappear (become transparent) to be successful. Rather, success is translated into a matter of giving a satisfactory account. Of course, there is a degree of vagueness in the idea of a 'satisfactory account'. However, this vagueness may be analytically advantageous insofar as it does not require that inquirers set up foundational criteria from which to judge the adequacy of their accounts, or identify a state of perfect knowledge as an ideal.

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to ask of this idea of a 'satisfactory account': 'satisfactory for whom?' and 'satisfactory on what basis?' Social constructionists have often linked these questions together, arguing that different social groups frequently have different criteria for judging beliefs such that what is a satisfactory account for one group of inquirers may not be satisfactory for another. I would follow constructionists on this point. However, those who are inclined towards relativism are likely to add that there is no reasonable way of deciding between criteria, and thus there is no way for a group of inquirers to justify its reliance on one set of criteria rather than another. This being so, the relativist would argue, satisfaction with an account, as it is derived from an arbitrarily accepted set of criteria, is arbitrary itself.

I want to resist this argument. I agree with relativists that there is no meta-criterion which inquirers can use to decide which criteria are justified and which are unjustified. And I likewise accept that there is no algorithmic procedure that inquirers can use to decide between criteria. However, this does not mean that inquirers cannot use contingent reasoning and argumentation to give a

reasonable defence (in the sense of giving reasons) for adopting the criteria that they use. We see debates of this kind in philosophy frequently, such as debates about the merits of criteria such as predictive power and parsimony as means to assess natural scientific theories (e.g. Leplin, 1997; Baker 2003). And in defending their criteria, inquirers are giving reasons for accepting an account as satisfactory, in the context of those criteria.

A relativist might respond to this by arguing that in giving reasons for criteria, inquirers must in turn be invoking some criteria which makes those reasons good ones. And if different groups have different views about which of these higher-level criteria are justified then the debate will go in circles rather than moving forward. I admit this is a possibility. But debates often don't seem to go that way. They frequently seem to involve not disagreements that we can see no way to resolve, but ones that we feel that discussion and perhaps the collection of evidence can have a positive bearing on.⁴ This process may not be simple; it may be very drawn out and extended. Nevertheless it does involve inquirers in making reasoned arguments in defence of their approach. And, this being the case, until such debates lead inquirers to change the criteria that they use they can reasonably defend judgements based on those criteria as satisfactory. Thus, my (sketchy) answers to the questions posed before are as follows. For whom is the account satisfactory? For the group of inquirers who uphold the criteria on which its satisfactory character is judged. On what basis is the account judged satisfactory? On the basis of consistency with the criteria upheld by the group of inquirers, criteria that they can give a contingently reasonable defence of using when debating with proponents of alternative criteria.

To note one further point, an emphasis on 'accounting for' some phenomenon rather than rendering it 'transparent' has the advantage for both the analysis school and feminist constructionism that it emphasizes the work that it is done by the analyst. Whether attempting to give an account of one's own presuppositions or the presuppositions of another approach, the analyst is still engaging in work, and it is exactly this kind of work that feminist constructionists and the Analysis school are interested in exploring. This seems to make 'accounting for' an appropriate concept for the theories of inquiry promoted by feminist constructionism and Analysis.

5. Conclusion: The Future of Reflexivity?

Up until this point in the chapter I have been focusing on the perhaps surprising set of overlaps between the work of the Analysis school and feminist constructionism. To conclude the discussion I would like to argue that each approach has something that they could offer the other that would help further develop how each approach deals with questions of sociality and reflexivity.

Beginning with the potential contribution of Analysis to feminist constructionism, this relates to the possibility that feminist reflexive analysis can have atomising or fragmenting effects. We saw above that feminist constructionists are concerned to situate knowers, but it is relevant to emphasize that this is frequently done by encouraging knowers to locate themselves within intersecting social inequalities. That is to say, feminist constructionists believe that knowers should locate themselves

⁴ My suspicion is that this is because such debates rarely involve two groups whose sets of criteria are such that they share no criteria at all. What is much more common is that groups agree on and use some criteria but disagree about others. The points of agreement can then be drawn on as part of resolving disagreements.

within social constructed patterns of gender inequality, ethnic inequality, class inequality and so on because of the potential impact of these on the values and assumptions of the knower. The issue that has been raised by some feminist thinkers, however, is the potential for this approach to hermetically seal each intersectionally-formed group of knowers off from the others, e.g. fundamentally separating the views of black lesbian feminists from white heterosexual feminists. That is to say, treating the understandings of knowers in that way seems to assume that members of each group are trapped in their perspective such that interactions with others simply result in each side retaining their pre-existing viewpoint. Useful moves have been made by thinkers such as Susan Strickland (1994) and Sylvia Walby (2001) to challenge the idea of 'epistemological chasms' (to use Walby's phrase). Strickland and Walby argue, in different ways, for the importance of engagement between perspectively-shaped sets of understandings because that will help these to develop. My proposal here is that these conceptual moves could be further advanced by interaction with the Analysis-based idea of collaboration.

As outlined in *OBSI*, collaboration is seen as crucial to Analysis because it allows inquirers to formulate the auspices, the grounds, of their understandings. The model is not simply of 'ego' speaking but a collaboration between 'ego' and 'alter' to help formulate the auspices of the other and develop their understandings further (see particularly Chapter 1 of McHugh et al, 1974). Such an orientation has the reflexive character that feminist constructionists wish to incorporate within their work. But it is also explicitly oriented to engagement with the other and to the development of a perspective, rather than to stasis. This understanding of the productive nature of dialogical collaboration can be further augmented by reference to the work of Charles Taylor, whose ideas have strong affinities with those of the Analysis school. In particular, it is possible to draw on Taylor's idea that the process of engagement should not be treated as one that necessarily leaves one or both sets of understandings intact, but instead should generate a 'language of perspicuous contrast' (Taylor, 1985: 125). By relating sets of understandings through this language of contrast it may become apparent that one or both is in need of revision, thus introducing a dynamic of development. Proponents of Analysis would surely add that this new language of contrast will need to have its own auspices formulated through collaborative Analysis, and this is a further legitimate part of the ongoing work of developing understanding. Although only briefly characterised here, these conceptual resources may help feminist thinkers who are critical of the atomisation of different viewpoints to conceptualize alternative ways of relating.

Is there something that feminist constructionism can contribute to Analysis in order to reciprocate? I would argue that there is. When members of the Analysis school are undertaking a reflexive analysis, their tendency is to focus on features like shared 'forms of life' (or later, the 'lifeworld'), the auspices of which have to be located through Analysis. It seems to me that feminist constructionism can help to take this forward through its concern with the way in which those who share a form of life may, nevertheless, be positioned in different ways within that form of life due to social inequalities. In *OBSI*, McHugh et al reject an approach which argues that 'thinking is "caused" by "things" like society, groups, classes, and world views' (McHugh et al, 1974: 17). In my view this critique of a reductionist approach to the sociology of knowledge is justified. Nevertheless, if one treats inequalities not as 'things' but as meaning-based features of a form of life, their relevance should be acknowledged insofar as positions of advantage and disadvantage are not shared by all, but differentiate members. As well as raising moral issues, these inequalities impact on what can be

thought and said by different members, their 'possibilities', and this is something that deserves further investigation.

It would be fair to acknowledge that at least one proponent of the Analysis school has explored some of the issues around the complexity of the community in relation to inequality. McHugh (2005) addresses the inequalities brought about in the USA by slavery and considers the on-going relevance of such inequalities in relation to debates about affirmative action. Although this is undoubtedly an insightful analysis, McHugh's focus is on the justification for affirmative action rather than on the way that inequality impacts on the auspices of different members of the community. It is a concern with the latter that I would suggest feminist constructionism can help Analysis to develop.⁵

Of course, it would be inconsistent of me to argue that in adopting a concern with the stratification of a form of life and the impact of this on the perspectives of members, Analysis should resort to the idea that differently-located individuals have distinct, sealed-off perspectives on the world, each sub-group having its own bounded set of understandings or indeed auspices. This would be to recommend the adoption of an approach that I have just questioned in relation to feminist constructionism. What seems more plausible is that there is some degree of shared understanding and some degree of differentiated understanding between different members of a form of life, and these different understandings are not self-validating and self-sustaining but can be challenged and developed through interaction with others, including collaboration.

I have argued in this chapter that both feminist constructionism and Analysis already share a range of presuppositions. What I have suggested in this concluding section is that both feminist constructionism and Analysis can nevertheless benefit from taking into account aspects of the other's approach.

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⁵ I should note that there are hints of how these issues might be conceptualised from the perspective of Analysis in the paper on snubs (see particularly p. 133 of McHugh et al, 1974). These are another resource for developing an understanding of inequality and difference within the community.

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